TOKYO HYBRID DWELLING
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Introduction

Japanese culture has always fascinated me, from film to religion and art. There is something so clearly different from western culture, a sort of spiritualism that is set in a completely different context from western countries. Many of my favourite architects and architectural firms come from Japan, such as atelier Bow Wow, Toyo Ito and Saana, to name a few. I’ve always been inspired by their sense of space, minimalism, contextualism as well as their extravagance.

I’ve decided to continue to study Japanese culture and the many modern issues Japanese cities are facing. I found the diverse living situation existing in Japan interesting and would like to further discuss and explore solutions for modern problems that Tokyo is facing in a small scale housing intervention in Tokyo. The idea is to see what can be done for the city from a bottom-up urban intervention. Perhaps resulting in a new way of dealing with mega-cities, very often planned and solved with top-down master planning.

Tokyo brief

Tokyo is one of the world’s most eminent global cities, having a vital economic foundation and is continuously striving to maintain their position as one of the world’s most modern cities. It is seen as a role model for cities that want to gain positions in the forefront of international trade and opportunity. Tokyo is also Japan’s centre for culture and politics. Despite Tokyo’s position in the world, Tokyo is currently facing many problems. These problems are mainly overcrowding and congestion. Tokyo is suffering from an increase in poverty and class stratification, there is a lack of affordable housing and is facing a rise of unemployment and homeless citizens.

Tokyo and diversity

Looking at the context of the architecture in Tokyo there are several things that stand out. Because of the earthquake in 1923, the bombings of the second world war and a series of construction booms since constructed the cityscape is a varied collection of different styles, ages and functions, making it a difficult urban context to relate to. Tokyo also lack in a pattern of public space that most western large cities display, the high density and value of land forcing buildings to stand exceedingly close to its neighbours and the street. The question is, should a building relate to this chaotic setting or should it reject the city and its’ incoherent urbanity. All of these issues also present several possibility for experimentation within the subject of architecture, since the setting is quite unique to megacities.
Living

In Japan you can find a diversity of housing typologies. This diversity stems from a multitude of reasons, such as workers often being sent to places far away for their jobs, the living situation of families and for foreign workers.

Houses in Japan have a very short lifespan (20 years for wooden houses and 30 for concrete) and in contrast to many western countries the houses are devalued according to age. When a house has met its lifespan, most families choose to tear it down to build a new one. Because of the high cost of housing in large cities in Japan, more than 50% choose to rent their houses and apartments.

Many Japanese singles choose to stay living with their parents, up to 80% of single women and 60% of single men between the ages of 20 and 34 stay with their parents. This phenomenon is called “parasite singles”. After getting married many couples choose to stay on with their families and dividing their house. This is called a “nisedaijūtaku” a two generation housing. It is also traditional for the elderly to stay living with their children, instead of being put into homes.

Foreign workers coming to Japan often find it hard to find an apartment due to lack of housing and discrimination. Therefore a phenomenon called the “gaijin house” (house for foreigners) has developed, it serves as a guest house. Many companies also offer accommodation for their workers in company apartment buildings, called “shataku”. These company housings are quite common (1.5 million registered in Japan 2003).

Urban development goals for dwellings

In 2011 the Bureau of Urban Development Tokyo Metropolitan Government presented a plan for further development goals of the urban environment in Tokyo. Their basic concept being:

“creating an attractive and prosperous, environmentally-leading city that will serve as a model for the world”

The urban development plan present two priority perspectives for housing policies in the next 10 years.

1. Ensure safety and security of housing

Including disaster safety, ensuring safety in housing transactions and promoting information provision on housing history and housing providers. It also includes safety for elderly by improving safety-net functions of public housing and providing an environment where the elderly and others can move smoothly into rental housing provided by the private sector.
2. Develop housing and communities that will last for generations

To proceed with housing development in which quality housing are utilized for a longer time by the whole society and to develop housing and communities that take the environment and landscape into consideration.

Thesis goal

With the issues posed I would like to work with a relatively small plot in central Tokyo, finding, as previously said solutions to the overcrowding, the cost of land, the diversity of living and an architecture that can work in such a modern, diverse and extremely dense setting. I would also like to address some opportunities that central Tokyo presents, such as the tourism. Therefore I would like to propose to build a hybrid building, catering both to the inhabitants of Tokyo as well as to the tourists and foreign workers. My suggestion is a small scale multi-functional housing building that might include guest housing, company housing, hostel and multi generation housing. I would also like to include a solution for public spaces in the dense city.

Such a solution could create a longer lifespan for a building, create a new connection between different socio-economical groups and further explore the modern typologies of Japan.